



Media Advisory

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Virginia's Public Health Laboratory Begins Testing for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID 19)

~ First two suspected cases tested at Virginia's State Laboratory are negative; Local testing cuts time to report results from days to hours ~

Richmond, VA – The Department of General Services (DGS) today announced that its Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services (DCLS), Virginia's public health and environmental laboratory, has begun testing for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The laboratory tested two suspected cases over the weekend, and results for both were negative.

"No cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed in Virginia at this time, and our public health officials are working diligently to ensure early detection of any suspected cases," said **Governor Northam**. "Our ability to test suspected COVID-19 cases locally is critical to quickly diagnosing and providing treatment to anyone who may become infected, as well as stopping the spread of this novel virus among our citizens."

Until February 29, 2020, all suspected COVID-19 samples were sent to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for testing, which could take up to a week to report results. Local testing at DCLS can cut the time for results to just hours.

DCLS will test samples from individuals identified by the Virginia Department of Health as a Person Under Investigation (PUI), meaning they meet both the clinical and epidemiologic criteria for COVID-19.

VDH reports patients under investigation who are Virginia residents on its website, vdh.virginia.gov. Overall, Virginia has tested or sent to the CDC for testing specimens from 11 PUI, and all have been negative.

“Our DCLS laboratory is pleased to be able to offer this important testing in support of Virginia’s public health response efforts,” said **Joe Damico, Director of DGS**. “Whether it is a new and emerging disease such as COVID-19 or routine testing for public health or environmental threats, we are committed to providing accurate and timely laboratory testing.”

“The commonwealth's ability to test patients under investigation for COVID-19 is essential to addressing this public health threat,” said **Dr. Lilian Peake, State Epidemiologist**. “Detecting cases of COVID-19 early is critical in helping to prevent spread and protect our communities.”

In order to expand testing capabilities nationwide, the CDC gained approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in February under Emergency Use Authorization to distribute a diagnostic test for detection of the virus that causes COVID-19 to state public health laboratories nationwide. In order to be able to perform the testing, DCLS worked quickly to verify the performance of the method.

At this time, there is no vaccine to protect against COVID-19 and no medications approved to treat it.

DCLS performs more than 9 million tests annually to identify genetic and metabolic disorders in newborn children and to detect infectious agents and toxic chemicals in humans, animals, the environment, the food we eat and the water we drink. For more information on DCLS, visit the DGS website at dgs.virginia.gov.

For more information about COVID-19, visit vdh.virginia.gov.

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